

# The Forgotten Worker: Veteran

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## Veteran Workforce Statistics

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- The unemployment rate of veterans from all eras is 8.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).
- The unemployment rate of veterans from the current conflict is 21.9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).
- Current estimate of Veteran population is 20.2 million men and 1.8 million women.

## Veterans in the Workplace

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- Now, more than ever, veterans are seeking employment post deployment.
- Veteran workers face unique stressors and obstacles when seeking and maintaining employment.
- Employment professionals should be aware of obstacles in order to provide a stable and enriching work environment.

## Combat Trauma and the Workplace

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- Trauma experienced in the military often causes severe and, sometimes, long-lasting psychological problems in many survivors.
- Common disorders associated with combat trauma are acute stress disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury and substance abuse.
- These disorders have long lasting effects that can carry over into civilian life.

## Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

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- Symptom groups similar to PTSD
  - Exposure to traumatic event
  - Dissociative Symptoms
  - Reexperiencing Symptoms
  - Avoidance of stimuli reminiscent of the trauma
  - Anxiety or increased arousal
  - Duration: 2 days to 4 weeks

## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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- It occurs as a result of experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event
- The event results in the individual feeling horrified and helpless



## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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- Three symptoms groups
  - B. re experiencing
    - Dreams, intrusive thoughts, images and/or perceptions.
  - C. Avoidance
    - Avoids activities, places, people or things that are reminiscent or symbolic of the traumatic event
  - D. Increased arousal
    - Trouble sleeping, irritability, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response.

## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can change your relationship with your community. Some people may shy away from you because of your PTSD. Getting work or finding a place to live may be more challenging.

## Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

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- Occurs as a result from trauma to the head
- Symptoms similar to PTSD/ASD
- Additional symptoms
  - Changes in sleep
  - Memory problems
  - Changes in mood

## Substance Abuse

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- Alcohol, illicit drugs, and the current trend to abuse prescription drugs may be used as a means to cope with and reduce stress.
- Research has documented a strong association between PTSD and substance abuse.
- In most cases, substance use begins after the exposure to trauma and the development of PTSD, making PTSD a risk factor for drug abuse (Hanson, 2002).
- Exposure to stress is also one of the most powerful triggers for relapse in substance abuse.

## Addiction and PTSD

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- Substance abuse, a common problem with PTSD, may make it hard to find a job. If you have this problem, talk to your doctor about getting drug or alcohol treatment such as counseling. You can find counseling through churches or through drug and alcohol rehab programs.

## Comorbidity

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- Most common comorbid disorders with lifetime PTSD for MEN
  - Alcohol Abuse or Dependence 51 . 9%
  - Major Depression 47 . 9%
  - Conduct Disorder 43 . 3%
  - Drug Abuse or Dependence 34 . 5%
- Most common comorbid disorders with lifetime PTSD for WOMEN
  - Major Depression 48 . 5%
  - Simple Phobia 29%
  - Social Phobia 28 . 4%
  - Alcohol Abuse/Dependence 27 . 9%

## Stigma

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- People sometimes have negative views about things they don't know much about, such as mental illness. This is called stigma.
- Because of stigma about PTSD, individuals may look down on veterans because of their condition. People may believe things about PTSD that aren't true, which can cause them to treat affected individuals and their family differently.
- Some people may have good intentions but still feel uncomfortable when when faced with an individual with PTSD. This can make it difficult to find a job or a place to live.

## Stigma occurs when others:

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- Don't understand PTSD
- Don't realize that PTSD is an illness that can be treated
- Think that mental illness is "your own fault" or that you can "get over it."
- Are afraid they might catch what you have
- Think PTSD makes you dangerous

## Common Effects of Stigma

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- The individual may feel shame or guilt about having PTSD. They may not want an employer or even their friends to know. This is called "self-stigma," and it can impede an individual's progress in getting treatment or finding work.
- Respecting one's self is an important part of recovery. Guilt and shame may keep an individual from seeking help.
- Attitude and actions can influence what others think. Becoming educated on the effects of PTSD can help eliminate stigma.

## Here are some ways you can help others better understand PTSD:

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- Let them know that PTSD is a medical condition that can be treated.
- Talk about the recovery process. This will help build an understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with PTSD.



## Veterans and the Work Place

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- Work is an important part of life and identity. Having a job helps individuals feel better about themselves and their future. It gives individuals a chance to connect with others. Work also provides needed income, and it gives individuals a chance to learn and grow as a person.
- Because of stigma about PTSD, some employers may have concerns about hiring veterans. This can make it harder for a veteran to get the job they want or are qualified for.

## Getting help

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- Stigma about PTSD can make it hard to find work, and even finding housing can be a problem. But many cities have a local job service, employment office, or state health and welfare office. These organizations can help you get work or find a place to live. You also can find information about these services on the Internet.
- Doctors or local churches may be able to connect you with services that can help the veteran worker.

## Employment Resources

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- Most communities have resources, such as a local job service, which help veterans find a job. Community services include:
  - Job skills training.
  - On-the-job training placement.
  - Non-paid work experience placement.
  - Special employer incentive placement.